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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2386
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2251
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2830
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3136

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FOUR HUNDRED PRISONERS PARDONED FOR
NEUTRALITY DAY

REF: ASHGABAT 1395

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) On December 5, a presidential decree pardoned 400 prisoners in honor of the national Neutrality Day holiday (December 12). The names of 390 releasees were published in "Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper on December 6. The remaining ten prisoners were probably foreigners since their names are not typically published in such lists.

13. (SBU) Post noted the release of Valeri Pal, who had been tried on May 14, found guilty of theft, exceeding authority and forgery, and sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment in a strict regime prison (reftel). His family had contacted post to seek help in obtaining his release due to his serious health problems and inadequate medical treatment at the prison. Post confirmed with a family member that Pal had been released on the morning of December 7 and was at his home in Turkmenbashi that evening. His health condition was described as "all right."

14. (SBU) No individuals implicated in the November 2002 attempt on former President Niyazov were included on the list. Neither were any individual human rights cases of particular concern to post listed. Among the 390 people released, 357 were men and 33 were women. Only 54 had been convicted prior to 2008. The following shows the breakdown of the year in which the released prisoners were convicted: 2002 - 1; 2003 - 1; 2004 - 2; 2005 - 2; 2006 - 11; and 2007 - 137.

15. (SBU) A political officer at the OSCE Center in Ashgabat confirmed that, other than the release of Valeri Pal, none of the other cases were of particular interest to the OSCE. Most of the cases were quite recent, as noted above. Regarding the Pal case, the OSCE Center had been contacted by a foreign NGO and had provided advice about the appellate process in Turkmen courts.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: While the pardon was certainly good news for the concerned prisoners, the list indicated no softening

toward those arrested in 2002. Valeri Pal's release was welcome news, especially since the GOTX was no doubt aware of numerous embassy contacts with his family. Post will try to meet with Pal in the near future. END COMMENT.
MILES